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Conference

Explaining Universe – Systems, Humans and Arts.

Dedicated to 100th anniversary of Udo Kasemets

November 16–17, 2019

Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre, Organ Hall (A-404)

Graduate School of Culture Studies and Arts

ABSTRACTS

Immo Mikkelsen

Globally-thinking musician and a human being with Estonian origin: Udo Kasemets as part of broader Estonian musicscape

As Udo Kasemets had Canadian citizenship and his rise to worldwide recognition took place through Canada, his person and work in music can much more easily be connected with Canadian and American music scene than Estonian one. But Kasemets was born in Estonia, he started music studies in Estonia and most likely he got first impulse for his restless search to find answer to the question “what music is?” (his own words) in Estonia before he left his birthland in 1944 as a war refugee.

In 2006, Kasemets visited Estonia first time after more than six decades. He was invited to present his music at the festival Estonian Music Days. The trip was a bit surprise for those who knew him in Canada, as he backed away from the Estonian community there long ago. He was known as a man with global reach of thought, his closest friends were not Estonians.

Nevertheless, he came to Tallinn, spoke surprisingly good Estonian here and at some moments (of weakness?) got sentimental about his roots.

His unconventional interview in Tallinn can be seen as an attempt to explain Estonian-speaking people his ideas about music. It was like the old man wanted to express some conclusions of his long search, and he also tried to show the foundation his own music-making was based on. It is possible that Udo Kasemets was and still is much more connected to Estonian music in general than it might seem.

Jeremy Strachan

“From Whence Cometh He?”: Udo Kasemets and Experimental Music in 1960s Toronto

This guest lecture will outline the impact and influence of Udo Kasemets on experimental music practices in 1960s Toronto. Drawing from research conducted for the author’s doctoral



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thesis on Kasemets, this lecture presents an overview of Kasemets' important work as a concert organizer, critic, and composer during the first decades following his emigration to Canada in

1951. Upon his arrival, Kasemets quickly became an important figure in the small circle of modernist postwar composers in Canada. During the late 50s and early 60s, Kasemets earned a reputation for his trenchant music criticism lamenting Toronto's suffocating conservatism—“From Whence Cometh He?,” wrote a member of the city's outraged social elite in response to an unfavourable review of a beloved pianist. Upon his discovery of *Silence* in a Greenwich Village bookshop in 1961, Kasemets began a decade-long project of introducing Toronto audiences to Cagean experimentalism and mixed-media. This lecture will present Kasemets' main projects during that time: *Men, Minds, and Music*, the so-called “first” experimental concert series in Toronto, from 1963; *The Isaacs Gallery Mixed Media Concerts* of 1965–67; and the *Canavanguard* series of graphic scores, which most forcefully illustrated the influences of McLuhan and Cage on Kasemets' thought. This lecture also offers thoughts on the lasting impact made by Kasemets in Canada, beyond Toronto and the 1960s.

Theodore Parker

Udo Kasemets in the Context of North American Experimental Music

Udo Kasemets was a composer, organizer, and music journalist who had a keen awareness of the experimental art movements taking place in North America during the 1950s and 60s. In this presentation will look at a handful of these and their impact on Kasemets' activities. More than just a composer, Kasemets' thought of himself as a person who “*gets things going*”. Due to his awareness and desire to promote the new; many divergent ideas diffused themselves into his approach to organizing events. In particular, two series developed by Kasemets will be discussed: *Men, Minds, and Music* and *The Isaac Gallery Mixed Media Concerts*.

Tze Yeung Ho

Tracing the Footsteps of a Diaspora Composer: Udo Kasemets in Canada

Sharing the diaspora experience as a composer in Canada with Udo Kasemets, my presentation focuses on two institutions which we have inevitably been tied to as composers: the Canadian League of Composers (CLC, established in 1951) and the Canadian Music Centre (CMC, established in 1959). These two institutions were created in the period of post-war Canada, where the country was creating its own national identity within the arts. Today, these establishments bear the mission to promote the works and rights of Canadian composers. The current directors of these two establishments (Matthew Fava of CMC and Kathryn Knowles of CLC) are interviewed to discuss their visions of the past and the future. They reflect on the institutions' functions at the time of their conception (also when Kasemets settled in Toronto) and how they differ from what they have become today. Furthermore, this presentation will discuss how these institutions have affected the lives and careers of diaspora and immigrant composers in Canada since their beginnings.

Taavi Kerikmäe to be updated



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Giovanni Albini

A ‘mechanical duologue’: science and systems in the art of Udo Kasemets

What is a system and how the concept can be related to art? How and why scientific notions merge with artistic ones, especially during the 20th Century? These questions will be addressed by presenting some ideas and music scores of Udo Kasemets. In a 2002 interview, he stated: “Something new had to be found. What I do now, how I think about it now? [...] everything was possible. But you have to find a disciplined way to deal with it, because there is so much of it, too much of it. [...] Everything is available, so you have to find ways to order it. [...] Some of nature works in very aggressive ways that are not conducive to our everyday patterns. By understanding it [...] we can use them to our advantage. It’s very analytical.”

Ragne Kõuts-Klemm *to be updated*

Andres Kurg *to be updated*

Mani Mazinani *to be updated*